

Message Text

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INFO USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BERN

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

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AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 TOKYO 17858

MANILA FOR USADB

E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEETING OF IBRD COORDINATING GROUP ON NEPAL

1. SUMMARY. TOKYO DECEMBER 2 INAUGURAL MEETING ON NEPAL WAS CONVENED BY IBRD ON GROUNDS THAT NEPAL GOVERNMENT'S SHIFT TO MORE COMPLEX STRATEGY, TOGETHER WITH SIZE OF DONOR GROUP, JUSTIFIES ESTABLISHMENT OF COORDINATION MECHANISM. NEPALESE SPOKESMAN MADE PLEA FOR CONCESSION AID IN SUPPORT OF NEW STRATEGY AIMED AT DIRECTLY PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES, SUCH AS SPEEKING UP RURAL DEVELOPMENT, WITH LESS EMPHASIS ON INFRA-STRUCTURE. DONORS WERE GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE BUT MORE URGED UNCLASSIFIED

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GREATER EFFORT BY NEPAL TO INCREASE DOMESTIC QRESOURCE MOBIL-IZATION, SPEED UP PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION, REDUCE BURGEONING POPULATION GROWTH RATE.

CONFEREES AGREED ON FOLLOW UP MEETINGS TO BEGIN IN KATHMANDU 1977. END SUMMARY.

2. IBRD COORDINATING GROUP ON NEPAL INAUGURATED AT TOKYO MEETING DECEMBER 2. DONOR NATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED WERE AUSTRIA, CANADA, FRANCE, FRG, JAPAN, SWITZERLAND, UK, U.S. IBRD, ADB, IMF AND UNDP. AGENDA COVERED OPENING STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN ON BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF MEETING NEPALESE EXPOSITION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOCUSSED ON INCREASING DIRECTLY PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES; DONOR COUNTRIES' COMMENTS, AND QUESTION AND ANSWER DIALOGUE WITH NEPALESE ON ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES; DONOR COUNTRIES' AND ORGANIZATIONS' DESCRIPTION OF OWN AID PROGRAMS AND FUTURE AID PLANS; AND CLOSING STATEMENTS BY HMG DELEGATE AND CHAIRMAN.

3. CHAIRMAN (BLOBEL, IBRD) OPENED BY STATING THAT CURRENT STAGE OF NEPALI DEVELOPMENT MAKES DESIRABLE A CONSULTATIVE GROUP FOR NEPAL WHICH WILL PAY MORE ATTENTION THAN USUAL TO COORDINATION OF DONORS' AID PROGRAMS. EMPHASIS IN NEPAL'S DEVELOPMENT, HE NOTED, RECENTLY HAD BEGUN TO SHIFT FROM INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS WHICH WERE PRIMARILY CIVIL ENGINEERING TASKS TO PROJECTS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT WHICH RAISE FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL MAJOR PROBLEMS OF ORGANIZATION, PRIORITIES, AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY. HE POINTED OUT THAT DANGER OF FAILURE TO USE EXTERNAL RESOURCES TO BEST ADVANTAGE OF NEPAL WOULD COME LESS FROM FACT THAT SOME DONORS (E.G. USSR, PRC) REMAIN OUTSIDE GROUP, THAN FROM POSSIBILITY THAT DONORS WOULD RESPOND (AS HAS SOMETIMES OCCURRED IN SIMILAR PAST SITUATIONS) TO THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL PREOCCUPATIONS, OR TO PRESSURES ON THEMSELVES. HE SET THE MEETING THE TASK OF EXPLORING WAYS OF ACHIEVING THAT COORDINATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEPAL WHICH WOULD GIVE MEANING TO THE COORDINATING GROUP ITSELF. (COMMENT: INDIA'S XURE PARTICIPATION IN GROUP REMAINS UNCERTAIN.) UNCLASSIFIED

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4. NEPALI DELEGATION LEADER (MINISTER OF FINANCE THAPA) REVIEWED 1975-80 NEPALI DEVELOPMENT PLAN'S CONCENTRATION ON AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED SECTORS, EXPLAINING THAT INFRASTRUCTURE HAS REACHED POINT WHERE PROJECTS CAN BE UNDERTAKEN THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT "LIVES OF THE POOR MAJORITY." HE CAUTIONED THAT PRIORITY OF AGRICULTURE SECTOR DID NOT MEAN THAT HMG WOULD REFRAIN FROM REQUESTING AID IN OTHER AREAS. NOR DID IT MEAN TQT HMG WOULD WELCOME EVERY AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM PROPOSED BY A DONOR, OR EVEN EVERY ONE VIEWED BY HMG AS DESIRABLE IN ITSELF. FOR EXAMPLE, HMG REQUESTS FOR EXTERNAL FINANCING INCLUDE PROJECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM (IMPORTANT FOR ITS FOREIGN EXCHANGE IMPACT), HEALTH SERVICES (IMPORTANT FOR QUALITY OF LIFE OF PEOPLE) AND INFRASTRUCTURE

(STPLL SERIOUSLY INADEQUATE). CONTRARIWISE, HE MAINTAINED THAT SOME AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS ARE NOT "WELL SUITED TO EXTERNAL FINANCING".

5. MINISTER, NOTING VARIOUS ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGES OF NEPAL (E.G. TRANSPORT COSTS AND DEALSY--WHICH PRODUCE NOT ONLY HIGH PRICES IN GENERAL BUT ALSO FREQUENT OVERRUNS ON PROJECTS--AND STEADILY RISING IMPORT PRICES COMBINED WITH VARIABLE PRICES FOR EXPORTS, WHICH ARE MAINLY RICE) POINTED TO SHORTFALL OF DOLS 124,000,000 FOR NEPALI DEVELOPMENT OVER NEXT THREE YEARS, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT ALL ANTICIPATED DOMESTIC AND PLEDGED FOREIGN RESOURCES. MINISTER ADDED THAT RECENT INCREASE IN RATIO OF HMG REVENUES TO GDP, MADE POSSIBLE BY PAST TAX MEASURES, IS NOT LIKELY TO GO FARTHER IN NEPAL'S PRESENT STATE OF ECONOMIC STAGNATION, AND THAT BUDGET DEFICIT CONTINUES TO MOUNT AS NEPAL'S CAPABILITY FOR PLANNING AND EXECUTING NEW PROJECTS EXPANDS. THUS, NOT ONLY COORDINATION BUT EXPANSION OF AID IS NEPALI AIM.

6. RECURRENT THEMES OF DONOR COMMENTS ACKNOWLEDGED NEPAL'S ISOLATION, FORMIDABLE TOPOGRAPHY, LIMITED NATURAL RESOURCE ENDOWMENT AS CAUSATIVE FACTORS FOR EXTREME POVERTY, NOTED THAT SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENTS MADE PREVIOUSLY IN INFRASTRUCTURE (MOSTLY ROADS) WERE NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT TO ENABLE IMPROVEMENT IN NEPAL'S STAGNANT GROWTH RATE. DONORS ALSO NOTED THAT POPULATION GROWTH UNCLASSIFIED

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RATE MORE THAN OFFSET ECONOMY'S MARGINAL GROWTH RATE, EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT IF UNCHECKED, NEPAL COULD RAPIDLY SLIP FROM RICE EXPORTER STATUS TO BECOME NET FOOD IMPORTER. DONORS ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT STAGNANT ECONOMY WOULD BE UNABLE CARRY RECURRENT COST BURDEN OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF EXISTING INVESTMENTS. VIRTUALLY ALL URGED IMPORTANCE OF SELF-HELP MEASURES, E.G.WM IMPROVING TAX REVENUE COLLECTIONS AND INCREASING WATER FEES TO HELP AMORTIZE IRRIGATION INVESTMENT COSTS. OTHER FREQUENTLY NOTED PROBLEMS INCLUDED NEPAL'S HEAVY RELIANCE ON EXTERNAL AID TO FINANCE DEVELOPMENT AND NEPAL'S PERSISTENT FOREIGN TRADE DEFICIT WHICH, ALTHOUGH OFFSET BY INVISIBLES (TOURISM,; REMITTANCES) WAS CHARACTERIZED AS AN UNDERLYING WEAKNESS IN ITS BALANCE OF PAYMENTS POSITION.

8. BEYOND THESE FREQUENTLY REPEATED COMMENTS, THE U.S. AND THE FRGHCAUTIONED THAT PROLIFERATION OF PROJECTS COULD DISSIPATE NEPAL'S SCARCE SKILLED MANPOWER AND LIMITED DOMESTIC RESOURCES, AND THEY PARTICULARLY NOTED NEPAL'S SHORTAGE OF MIDDLE AND MANAGERIAL LEVEL PROFESSIONALS. JAPAN QUESTIONED WHETHER THE GROWTH RATE TARGET OF FIVE PERCENT IS REALISTIC, WHILE THE IMF, ALTHOUGH PRAISING FISCAL AND MONETARY MEASURES WHICH HAD REDUCED NEPAL'S INFLATION

RATE FROM 15 PERCENT PER YEAR TO 4 PERCENT PER YEAR WITHIN THE LAST TWO YEARS, URGED GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN PRICING ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND OF ALL PUBLIC ENTERPRISE PRODUCTS.

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MANILA FOR USADB

9. INTRODUCING AGENDA ITEM 4 ON ROLE OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE, IBRD REP (BLOBEL) SAID SUBSTANTIAL EXTERNAL AID WAS INDISPENSABLE IF HMG WAS TO ATTAIN MEANINGFUL GROWTH RATE; THAT MINIMUM TARGET OF SEVEN PERCENT GDP ALLOCATED FOR DEVELOPMENT WAS ACHIEVABLE TARGET OF WHICH MORE THAN HALF (FOUR PERCENT) MUST BE FINANCED BY FOREIGN AID. (COMMENT: THIS FIGURE SUBSTANTIALLY AGREES WITH HMG'S ESTIMATE RECORDED IN PARA 5 ABOVE). THIS IMPLIED A DOUBLING OF AID LEVELS, BUT HE EXPRESSED VIEW THAT IF QUALITATIVE FACTORS SUCH AS SHARPENING OF FOCUS ON PRIORITY PROJECTS AND IMPROVED ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY ATTAINED, THIS GAP WILL CLOSE. BLOBEL SUGGESTED DONORS

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SHOULD GIVE PRIORITY TO SUCH PROJECT AREAS AS AGRICULTURE AND SMALL SCALE PROCESSING OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS, AS WELL AS NORTH-SOUTH FEEDER ROADS, SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE IRRIGATION, RURAL WATER SUPPLY, HEALTH AND FAMILY

PLANNING PROJECTS. HYDROPOWER GENERATION AIMED AT DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION (E.G. TUBE WELLS) SHOULD ALSO BE CONSIDERED. BLOBEL ALSO URGED COLLABORATIVE STYLE MAXIMIZING NEPALESE INVOLVEMENT IN PROJECT DESIGN FORMULATION AND EXECUTION, AND ASKED FOR MOST CONCESSIONAL TERMS POSSIBLE INCLUDING DONOR ASSUMPTION OF LOCAL COST AS WELL AS FOREX PROJECT FINANCING. BLOBEL ASKED IF DONORS AGREED WITH HMG'S PRIORITIES, WHETHER THEY FOUND THE GOVERNMENT'S PROJECT LIST USERUL, AND ASKED DONORS TO RECOUNT PROBLEMS THEY HAD ENCOUNTERED IN ADMINISTERING AID IN THE PAST.

10. TOPICS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO SOME DONORS WERE ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, SKILLED MANPOWER CONSTRAINTS AND DMESTIC BUDGET AND POSSIBLE FUTURE DEBT SERVICE BURDEN ON NEPAL. IN RESPONSE TO THESE OBSERVATIONS, HMG DELEGATION HEAD (FINANCE MINISTER THAPA) ASSERTED THAT GOVERNMENT HAD PREPARED A FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN AND A RESETTLMENT PLAN TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS, BUT ADMITTED THESE WERE STILL AT QTE CONCEPTUAL LEVEL UNQTE; DESCRIBED ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION WHICH IDENTIFIED THE REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW TRAINING INSTITUTES INCLUDING VOCATIONAL TRAINING FACILITIES; AND INDICATED ACCEPTANCE OF IMF ASSISTANCE IN REVISING TAX LEGISLATION, INCLUDING PLANS TO TAX AGRICULTURAL INCOME.

11. JAPANESE SPOKESMAN (KIKUCHI, DIRECTOR GENERAL, ECONOMIC COOPERATION BUREAU, MFA) ASKED CLARIFICATION OF NECESSITY FOR CO-FINANCING PROJECTS IN NEPAL. BANK STAFF REPLY WAS THAT SOME LARGE SCALE INVESTMENT WAS STILL REQUIRED TO COMPLEMENT SMALLER INVESTMENTS BEING MADE IN DIRECTLY PRODUCTIVE SECTORS. FOR EXAMPLE, PUMPED IRRIGATION SCHEMES UNDER CONSIDERATION WOULD ONLY BECOME FEASIBLE IF LOW-COST ELECTRIC POWER WERE AVAILABLE. THIS WOULD IMPLY THE NEED FOR A HYDRO-ELECTRIC DAM PROJECT THAT MIGHT BE TOO COSTLY FOR A SINGLE DONOR TO FINANCE.

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GQWM THE UNDP SPOKESMAN (MANFRED KULESSA) URGED NEPAL TO UTILIZE MORE ASSISTANCE FROM OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, AND TO ASSURE AN APPROPRIATE CHOICE OF TECH OLOGY IN SUCH ACTIVITIES AS TRANSPORT, ENERGY AND PUBLIC WORKS. ALSO MENTIONED BY UNDP WAS IMPORTANCE OF LABOR FORCE MOBILIZATION AND THE SUITABILITY OF LABOR-INTENSIVE SMALL AREA DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES FOR NEPAL. HE ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE GOVERNMENT UNDERESTIMATED THE DIFFICULTY OF MALARIA CONTROL, WHICH

HE THOUGHT WOULD REQUIRE A DECADE AND NEW TECHNOLOGY TO SOLVE. THE UNDP ADDED THAT POPULATION WAS THE MOST PERTURBING OF ALL NEPAL'S PROBLEMS.

13. COMMENT OF U.S. REP ON NEPAL'S DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY EMPHASIZED U.S. GOAL OF HELPING PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO THOSE NOT HERETOFORE REAKX BY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS. THIS INCLUDES PROJECTS TO INCREASE FOOD PRODUCTION; IMPROVE NUTRITION, HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING; EXPAND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES; AND TRAIN NECESSARY MANPOWER. REP ALSO EXPRESSED VIEW NEPALESE HAD NOT PLACED SUFFICIENT EMPHASIS IN DEPELOPMENT STRATEGY ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES.

14. IN SUMMARY, MOST DONORS SUPPORTED NEPAL'S BASIC STRATEGY OF THEIR FIFTH DEVELOPMENT PLAN TO FOCUS MORE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND SEEK TO LESSEN AREA IMBALANCES.

15. IN FINAL SATEMENT, IBRD CHAIRMAN PROPOSED CONTINUATION OF COORDINATION EFFORT ON TWO-TIERED BASIS WITH NEXT STEP SERIES OF KATHMANDU LEVEL MEETINGS WHICH WILL BE CO-CHAIRLED BY IBRD RES REP DEALING WITH PARTICULAR SECTORS OR SUB-SECTORS, AND WHICH WILL BE LIMITED TO PARTICULAR DONORS INVOLVED IN THOSE SECTORS. BLOBEL ANTICIPATED THOSE MEETINGS WOULD PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNTING OF DONOR ACTIVITIES; HELP IDENTIFY POSSIBLE OVERLAPPING OF GAPS; AND HELP TO ASCERTAIN TOTAL SECTORAL CONCENTRATION MEASURED AGAINST NEPAL'S ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY. HE ALSO ENVISAGED THE SECTORAL APPROACH AS MOST USEFUL TO HMG IN MAKING THEIR OWN BUDGETARY AND MANPOWER RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS TO MORE EFFECTIVELY TRANSLATE HMG'S NEW STRATEGY INTO SPECIFIC PROGRAMS OF ACTION. DONORS WERE ASKED BY THE CHAIRMAN IF THEY WOULD PARTICIPATE

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IN THIS PROCESS AND ASSIST THE BANK AND THE GOVERNMENT IN FORMULATING SPECIFIC DETAILED ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS. THE DONORS AGREED TO DO THIS WITHIN THEIR AREAS OF COMPETENCE AND AVAILABLE RESOURCES.

16. IN FINANCE MINISTER THAPA'S CLOSING REMARKS, HE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION TO THE BANK AND OTHER DONORS FOR LAUNCHING THE COORDINATION EFFORT, BUT CAUTIONED THAT NEPAL WOULD HAVE TO EXAMINE EACH SECTOR AND EACH DONOR'S PROPOSALS IN THE CONTEXT OF HER NATIONAL STRATEGY AND NEEDS; THAT PERHAPS INSTEAD OF EVERY DONOR BEING INVOLVED IN RIRAL DEVELOPMENT SOME DONORS MIGHT BE REQUESTED BY HMG TO UNDERTAKE ADDITIONAL CAPITAL PROJECT FINANCING EEEDED TO COMPLETE OR LINK THE REQUIREMENTS TO COMPLETE A TOTAL INVESTMENT PACKAGE. HE POINTED OUT THE IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PROVIDING ACCESS TO THE ISOLATED RURAL POOR, AND FOR PROVIDING THEM WITH SERVICES.

17. AT CONCLUSION OF MEETING, CONFEREES AGREED, IN ADDITION TO HOLDING SECTORAL KAMQNDU MEETINGS, TO CONVENENE PERIODICALLY IN GENERAL MEETINGS TO REVIEW OVERALL STRATEGY AND ASSESS PROGRESS. BLOBEL'S CONCLUDING OBSERVATION WAS APPRECIATION OF UNANIMITY AND SUPPORT FROM DONORS TO ASSIST NEPAL'S DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS.

18. COMMENT. PRINCIPAL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF MEETING WAS GENERAL ENDORSEMENT MAJOR DONORS OF FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN HMG'S INVESTMENT PRIORITIES INTO FASTER-YIELDING PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES TOGETH WITH AGREEMENT OF DONORS TO PARTICIPATE IN DETAILED KATHMANDU DISCUSSIONS (WHICH WILL BE AIMED AT MAXIMIZING NEPAL'S GROWTH POTENTIAL AND AVOIDING OVER-; LOADING NEPAL'S LIMITED ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY) WHILE CONTINUING SERIES OF GENERAL MEETINGS AT LONGER INTERVALS. SOME DONORS NOTED (AND HMG REPS ACKNOWLEDGED) THAT NOT ALL DONORS WERE REPRESENTED IN TOKYO, AND EXPECTATION WAS THAT KATHHANDU MEETINGS WOULD GET TOTAL PICTURE TOGETHER FOR RELEVANT DONORS.
HODGSON

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